

## **Improving Services - DVA's Hospital Complaint Management Process**

In recent discussion with a group of ex-Service advocates and accredited volunteer hospital visit officers, the question arose, “*What do I do if someone wants to make a complaint about their hospital treatment?*”

So, if someone isn't satisfied with their hospital treatment, what should they do? Well, first, tell someone! Complaints (and compliments) provide unique feedback about the quality of care provided.

A complaint provides an opportunity for critical review and for action to improve a service, a processes involved in delivering a service or, often, a catalyst for improving communication and understanding between the patient, the patient's family and the service provider.

Raising concerns with the appropriate body at the appropriate time offers the best chance of resolving issues and of eliminating the risk that someone else will experience the same problem.

Generally speaking, a complaint should be raised as soon as possible direct with the service provider. Under the Agreements for public hospital treatment that DVA has with the States and Territories, hospitals must have a complaint management system. It is a requirement that an investigation is undertaken and the outcome is notified to DVA within 35 days.

A similar arrangement is in place for DVA-contracted private hospitals and day procedure centres, with complaints to be investigated and an outcome provided within 7 days.

Of course, there will be circumstances where someone feels they can't complain at the time, or where appropriate action to resolve their complaint hasn't been taken. In these cases, the person making the complaint (or someone with that person's authority to make a complaint) should contact DVA. The Department then arranges for the matter to be investigated and reported. When DVA is satisfied that appropriate action has been taken, a response is then provided to the complainant.

If the person is still not satisfied that their complaint has been adequately considered, or for particularly serious or systemic issues (eg. allegations of medical incompetence or negligence, professional misconduct, etc.), the complainant is encouraged to refer the matter to an independent body for investigation or arbitration.

Each State and Territory has an independent authority responsible for the oversight of quality activities in all public and private health services. The powers of these authorities include abilities to investigate and seek alternate clinical opinion, to refer to professional registration boards, and to undertake disciplinary actions and prosecutions. In NSW, the relevant authority is the NSW Health Care Complaints Commission (HCCC).

Advice on lodging a complaint with the HCCC and on HCCC Consumer Information Days is available at [www.hccc.nsw.gov.au](http://www.hccc.nsw.gov.au).